

The Root of Evil

By THOMAS DIXON

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CHAPTER VIII. A Straight Tip.

NAN received the announcement of Bivens' failure to settle Woodman's suit with a grin. The sensational reports of Stuart's action against the big financiers had given her quick mind the cue to a new line of stratagem. She began cautiously.

"You are not going to give up a thing I've set my heart on merely because old Woodman's a fool, are you?" she asked her husband, with a touch of scorn. "Jim Stuart is the best friend you ever had. He has become one of the most famous men in America. I want him at our next entertainment."

"The thing that puzzles me," Bivens broke in, "is why he will not come to the house. When I meet him down town he's always friendly."

Nan's lips quivered with a queer little smile.

"Will he succeed in this action against these men?"

"No; he can't get the facts. If he could he'd shake the foundations of the financial world."

"Why not give the facts to him?"

"I had thought of that, but it might bring on a panic."

"What have you to lose by it?"

"Nothing, but a panic's a dangerous thing to monkey with."

"It couldn't injure Stuart?" his wife asked cautiously.

"No. It couldn't hurt him. On the other hand, I might make him the unconscious instrument of a great personal vengeance, double my fortune and possibly land Jim in the White House."

"You must do it, dear!" his wife cried, trembling with suppressed excitement.

"It's playing with dynamite."

"It's worth the risk to double your fortune. Do it for my sake!"

Nan leaned close and pressed her husband's hand while her dark eyes found their way into his heart.

"I'll do it," he said with firm accent. "I'll phone him at once."

When Stuart sat down with Bivens in one of the magnificent private dining rooms of his millionaire club two days later he was struck with the perfection of the financier's dress and the easy elegance of his manners.

"Nan has surely done wonders with some pretty crude material," he mused. He recalled Nan's diary with grim amusement.

It took two years to thoroughly break him so that she could always be sure that his suits were trimmed and his clothes in perfect style. He had long since ceased to struggle and had found much happiness in late years in vying with her in the perfection of his personal appearance.

When the dinner was finished Bivens dismissed the waiter, lighted one of his huge cigars and drew from a mahogany case which he had placed beside his chair a typewritten manuscript. He turned its leaves thoughtfully a moment and handed them to Stuart.

"There's a document, Jim, that cost me \$10,000 to prepare; for whose suppression \$1,000,000 would be paid and no questions asked."

"But why this generosity on your part, Cal?"

"I have anticipated that question I answer it fully and frankly. There is enough dynamite in that document to blow up half of Wall Street and land somebody in the White House."

"And many in the morgue?"

"And some in the penitentiary. I've watched your work the past nine years with genuine pride, Jim. You've said a lot of hard things about rich malefactors, but you've never touched me."

"No, I think you're too shrewd to be caught in that class, Cal."

"I pride myself that I am. It's only the clumsy fool who gets tangled in the criminal law. But a lot of them have done it—big fellows whose names fill the world with noise. I've taken the pains to put into that typewritten document the names, the dates, the places, the deeds, the names of the witnesses and all the essential facts. Do what you please with it. If you do what I think you will, some men who are wearing purple and fine linen will be wearing stripes before another year and you will be the biggest man in New York."

"And your motive?"

"Perhaps I wish to get even with some men who have done me a dirty trick or two, and perhaps incidentally in the excitement which will follow this exposure of fraud and crime I may make an honest penny. Is that enough?"

"Quite."

"And you'll make the attack at once?"

Stuart glanced rapidly through the first page of the document, and his eyes began to dance with excitement.

"The only favor I ask," Bivens added, "is twenty-four hours' notice before you act."

"I'll let you know," Stuart rose quickly, placed the document in his inside pocket and hurried home.

The deeper the young lawyer probed into the mass of corruption Bivens had placed in his hands the more profound became his surprise. That men whose names were the synonyms of honesty and fair dealing, men intrusted with the management of companies whose assets represented the savings of millions of poor men, the sole defense of millions of helpless women and children—that these trusted leaders of the world were habitually prostituting their trusts for personal gain, staggered belief.

He delayed action and began a careful, patient, thorough investigation. As it proceeded his amazement increased. He found that Bivens had only scratched the surface of the truth. New York, the financial center of the nation, had gone mad with the insane passion for money at all hazards—by all means, fair or foul. The nation was on the tidal wave of the most wonderful industrial boom in its history. The price of stocks had reached fabulous figures and still soared to greater heights. Millions were springing up, like mushrooms, in a night.

Two months had passed since Bivens placed in the district attorney's hands the document which was destined to make sad history in the annals of the metropolis. Stuart felt that the time had come to act. It was his solemn duty to the people.

He sat in his private office in one of the great skyscrapers downtown holding in his hand a list of the men he was about to ask the grand jury to indict for crimes which would send them to prison, exile and dishonored death.

"I've got to do it—that's all. But before I do, I'm going to know one or two things beyond the shadow of a doubt."

He seized his telephone and made an appointment to call at once on Bivens.

The financier extended his delicate hand and with a cordial smile led Stuart to a seat beside his desk. The only sign he betrayed of deep emotion was the ice-like coldness of his slender fingers.

"Well, Jim, you've completed your very thorough investigation?"

"How did you know I was making a thorough investigation?"

"I make it my business to know things which vitally interest me. You found my facts accurate, and you are ready to strike?"

"When I have confirmed some statements you have made in your story."

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"Well, Jim, you've completed your very thorough investigation?"

partment of the industrial world where my interests touch theirs.

"I not only watch the heads of firms; I watch their trusted assistants and confidential men. In that big safe a thousand secrets lie locked whose revelation would furnish matter enough to run the yellow journals for the next five years. Modern business is war the fiercest and most cruel the world has ever known. It is of greater importance to know the plans of his enemy than it ever was to the commanding general of an opposing army."

"I see," Stuart responded thoughtfully. "There are men down there in the street now," Bivens went on dreamily, "who are wearing silk hats today for whom the prison tailor is cutting a suit. I have their records in that silent steel clad room. It's a pitiful thing, but it's life."

"The scariest thing in New York to day, Jim, is the man who can't be bought and sold. The thing that's beyond price in the business world is character—combined with brains. That's why I made you the offer I did once upon a time to come in with me. There are positions today in New York with a salary of half a million a year waiting for men who can fill them. If I could find one man of the highest order of creative and executive ability who would stand by me in my enterprises I could be the richest man in the world in ten years."

Stuart lifted his eyes from the record he was casually scanning and smiled into Bivens' dark, serious face.

The look silenced the speaker. The little man knew instinctively that Stuart was at that moment weighing his own life and character by the merciless standard he had set up for others. Judged by conventional laws, he had nothing to fear. He was a faithful member of his church. He gave liberally to his work and gave generously to a hundred worthy charities. He loved his wife with old fashioned loyalty and tenderness and grieved that she was childless. He stood by his friends and fought his enemies, asking no quarter and giving none.

Yet in his heart of hearts he knew that, however loftily he might discourse at present about "character," "honor," "integrity" and "fair dealing," he had stolen the formula from his big hearted employer, Woodman, with which he had laid the foundation of his fortune. It was the first half million that came hard. It was this first half million that bore the stain of shame.

His other questionable acts on which the fate of millions had often hung he had no difficulty in justifying. Business was war.

Bivens waited for Stuart to speak. The moment was one big with fate. Stuart was about to reach a decision that would make history. No one knew so well its importance as the keen intellect that gleamed behind the little black eyes watching with tireless patience. Below he could hear the roar of the city's life. Men bought and sold with no fear of tomorrow. Yet a single word from the lips of the tall, clean shaven young officer of the law and a storm would break which might tear from the foundations institutions on whose solidity modern civilization seemed to rest.

"Well, Jim," Bivens said at length, "you are going to act?"

Stuart rose abruptly, his reply sharp and clear:

"Yes, I'm going to act."

"At once?"

"It's my duty."

Bivens grasped his hand.

"I congratulate you, Jim. You are going to do a big thing, one of the biggest things in our history. You are going to teach the mighty that the law is mightier. It ought to find you at the very top in politics or any other old place you'd like to climb."

"That's something which doesn't interest me yet, Cal. The thing that stuns me is that I've got to do so painful a thing. But my business is the enforcement of justice. There's one thing I still can't understand—why you of all men on earth should have put this information in my hands. The honor of the achievement, if good shall come to the country, is really yours, not mine."

"And you can't conceive of my acting for the country's good?"

Bivens' black eyes twinkled.

"Not by the wildest leap of my imagination."

The twinkle broadened into a smile as the lawyer continued:

"Your code is simple, Cal. There's no provision in it for disinterested effort for others. This time you've got me up a tree. You have rendered the people a great service. You have placed me under personal obligations. But how you are going to get anything out of it is beyond me."

"Oh, I'll have my reward, my boy," Bivens answered jocularly, as his shiny fingers again stroked his beard, pressing his mustache back from the thin lips, "and I assure you it will not be purely spiritual."

The door had scarcely closed on Stuart when Bivens pressed the button which called his confidential secretary.

In a moment the man stood at his elbow with the tense erect bearing of an orderly on the field of battle. The quick nervous touch of the master's hand on that button had told to his sensitive ears the story of a coming life and death struggle. His words came with sharp, nervous energy:

"Yes, sir?"

"A meeting of the Allied Bankers here in thirty minutes. No telephone messages. A personal summons to each. They enter one at a time that no one on the outside sees them come."

CHAPTER IX.
The Storm Breaks.

THE sensation which the district attorney sprang in the sudden indictment of the president of the Troquois company was profound and far-reaching. The day before the indictment was presented to the grand jury stocks began to tumble without any apparent cause.

When the warrant for the arrest of the great man had been served, and he was admitted to bail to await his coming trial, there was a feeble rally in the market, but the rats quickly began to desert a sinking ship.

The president under indictment had ceased to be a power. There was a wild scramble of his associates who were equally guilty to save their own skins. The press, which at first denounced Stuart, now boldly demanded the merciless prosecution of all the guilty, and they hailed the brilliant young district attorney as the coming man.

For six consecutive days stocks had fallen with scarcely an hour's temporary rally. Every effort of the bull operators, who had ruled the market for the two years past, to stem the tide was futile. Below the surface, in the silent depths of growing suspicion and fear, an army of sappers and miners—under the eye of one man were digging at the foundations of the business world—the faith of man in his fellow man.

Each day there was a crash, and each day the little financier and his unscrupulous allies marked a new victim. In the midst of the campaign for the destruction of public credit which Bivens and his associates, the Allied Bankers, were conducting with such profound secrecy and such remarkable results, when their profits had piled up into millions, a bomb was suddenly exploded under their own headquarters.

The Van Dam Trust company was put under the ban of the New York clearing house. The act was a breach of faith, utterly unwarranted by any known law of the game. But it was done.

The president of the company walked quietly into Bivens' office and made the announcement for a moment the little dark man completely lost his nerve. Cold beads of sweat started from his swarthy forehead.

"There must be some mistake," "There's no mistake. It's a blow below the belt, but it's a knockout for the moment. They know we are solvent, two dollars for one. But they know we have \$20,000,000 on deposit, and we have some big enemies. They know that the group we have supported have smashed this market, and they're set out to fight the devil with fire. They're determined to force a showdown and see how much real money is behind us. We can pull through if we stand together."

Bivens sprang to his feet, exclaiming fervently:

"Until hell freezes over!"

The banker smiled feebly for the first time in a week.

"Then it's all right, Mr. Bivens. We'll pull through. They'll start a run on us tomorrow. Five millions in cash will meet it, and we'll win hands down. We have powerful friends. Our only sin is our association with your group. We must have that five millions in the bank before the doors are opened tomorrow."

"You shall have it," was the firm answer.

With a cheerful pressure of the hand the president of the Van Dam Trust company left, and Bivens called his secretary.

"We turn the market tomorrow—orders to all our men. Knock the bottom out of it until the noon hour, then turn and send it skyward with a bound."

When Dr. Woodman returned home that night from one of his endless tramps among the poor Harriet opened the door.

Something about the expression of his face startled her. For the first time in her life she saw in his gaunt lines the shadow of despair.

"What is it, papa, dear?" she asked tenderly, slipping an arm about his neck as she drew him down into his favorite chair.

"What, child?" he responded vaguely. "You look utterly worn out. Tell me what's the matter. I'm no longer a child. I'm a woman now—strong and well and brave. Let me help you."

"You do help me, baby," he laughed, with an effort at his old time joyous spirit. "Every time I touch your little hand you give me new life. Some day your voice will thrill thousands as it now thrills my heart. You'll win fame and wealth for your father. You shall care for him in old age. I'm not miserable. I've really had a good day. I've spent the whole afternoon superintending the distributing of flowers among the hospitals. I saved a kid's life with a flower. His father used to work for me in the old days. They asked me to come to see him. There was no hope. He had been given up to die. I gave him a fragrant white pink. His thin, feverish fingers grasped it eagerly. In all his life he had never held a flower in his hand before. He pressed it to his lips, his soul thrilled at its sweet odor, and the little tired spirit came staggering back from the mists of eternity just to see what it meant. He will live."

The girl's arms slipped around his neck in a tightening hold, and she pressed her cheek against his a moment in silence.

"Papa, dear, it's no use trying to deceive me. I've the right to know what is troubling you. I'm not a child. You must tell me."

"Why, it's nothing much, dearie," he answered gently. "I'm worried a little about money. I've a note due

at the bank, and they've called on me unexpectedly to meet it. But I'll manage somehow."

"I'll give up my music, go to work and help you right away."

The father placed his hand gently over her lips, and the tears sprang into his eyes in spite of his effort to keep them back.

"Don't talk sacrilege, my child. Such words are blasphemy. God gave me a man's body for the coarse work of bread winning. He gave you the supreme gift, a voice that throbs with eloquence, a power that can lift and inspire the world."

"Promise me, dear—it's the one wish of my heart, the one thing worth working and struggling for—promise me that you will never stop until the training of your voice is complete; that no matter what happens you will obey me in this. It is my one command. You will obey me?"

"Yes, papa, I promise, if it will make you happy."

"It's the only thing I live for. All I ask is that you do your level best with the gift of God."

"I'll try, papa dear," was the quiet answer as she kissed him again and softly left the room.

Harriet had scarcely reached her room when Adams, the cashier of one of the allied banks, who owed the doctor for three months' rent, entered the library with quick, nervous tread.

"I've news, sir," he said excitedly. "I've a big tip on the stock market."

The older man granted contemptuously.

"Yes, that's what all you, I know. You've been getting them for some time. That's why you owe me for your rooms. That's why there's some thing the matter with your accounts."

"I swear to you, doctor, my accounts are clean. I've bought a few stocks. I've made a little and lost a little. I've got the chance now I've been waiting for. I've a real piece of information from the big insiders who are going to make the market tomorrow. I got it from Bivens' private secretary. The little vessel has made millions on this break, and he has been selling the market short for two weeks. Tomorrow morning he is going to smash it for the last time and at noon throw his millions on the bull side. The market will go down three points on the break in the morning. It will jump five points in ten minutes when it turns the other way. There are stocks on the list that will recover ten points before the market closes."

"Bivens is going to do this?" the older man interrupted. "Then it's a trick. It's a lie. Take my advice and do just the opposite from what you understand. Bivens will sell out his partners in the deal."

"May he can't sell out," the cashier insisted. "It's his own deal. He's in it for all his worth!"

The doctor rose with sudden excitement.

"Adams, this is the first time in my life I've ever been tempted to buy stocks. I'm in desperate need of money. I've a note for \$3,000 due. I've \$2,000 set aside to finish my little girl's musical studies. I've got to meet that note somehow, and I've got to have the money for her. It looks like a chance. I'll go in and watch the market tomorrow."

"If it don't act exactly as I say don't touch it. If it does, go in for all you're worth. If stocks start down as I say they will, sell short, cover at noon and they buy for a rise. Don't listen to fools—just buy, buy! You can sell before the market closes and make \$20,000."

"I'll drop into a broker's office and watch the market open, anyway. Adams. Thank you."

The next day the more optimistic traders on the stock exchange expected a change in the market. Stocks had declined for two weeks with appalling swiftness and fatality. Every hour had marked the ruin of men hitherto bulwarks of solidity. Experienced men reasoned and reasoned from experience that there must be a turn somewhere. The bottom surely had been reached. The time for a rally had come.

Stuart slept late. He was up until 1 o'clock writing a reply to a particularly venomous attack on his integrity which a morning paper had printed. The writer had boldly accused him of being the hired tool of the group of financial outcasts who were coining millions out of the ruin of others in the destruction of public faith.

His reply was simple, and his concluding paragraph was unanswerable except by an epithet.

"My business is the enforcement of justice. I am the servant of the people. If Wall Street cannot stand the enforcement of law so much the worse for the street. It is no affair of mine."

Dr. Woodman hurried downtown to the office of a friend on Pine street, an old fashioned banker and broker whose name had always stood for honesty and fair dealing and conservative business. It was half an hour before the stock exchange opened, but the dingy little office was packed with an excited crowd of customers.

The doctor followed old Dugro, the head of the firm, into his private office and asked his advice. He got it—sharp, short and to the point.

"Go home, doctor, and stay there. This market is no place for an amateur. It's all I can do to keep the wolf from my door in these days."

"But I've received some important information."

"Keep it dark," old Dugro scowled. "Don't tell it to your worst enemy. If you've got a dollar, nail it up and sleep on the box."

"But I've some information I think I'm going to act on and I want to open a small account with you."

"All right. I've warned you," was the grim answer. "I wish you good luck."

The doctor drew his check for \$2,000 and smilingly took his place among the crowd before the board.

The ticker would tell the story in the first hour. If stocks should sell off three points before noon, he would know. He determined to put this to the test first. He would not sell the market short. He would be content with the big jump the market would make upward when it started.

As the noon hour drew near the doctor's heart was beating like a sledge hammer. Bivens' program had been carried out to the letter. Stocks had declined for the first hour a point, and in the second hour suddenly smashed down two more points amid the wildest excitement on the exchange.

The moment to buy had come. The doctor was sure of it. Stocks had touched bottom. The big bear pool would turn bull in a moment and the whole market would rise by leaps and bounds.

He called old Dugro.

"Buy for me now Amalgamated Copper, the market leader, for all I'm worth!"

The broker glared at him.

"Buy! Buy in this market? Man, are you mad?"

"I said buy!" was the firm answer.

"What's the limit?"

"Not a share without a stop loss order under it."

"Well, with the stop?"

"I'll buy you 400 shares on a four point stop."

"And when it goes up five points?" the doctor asked eagerly.

"I'll double your purchase and raise your stop, and every five points up I'll keep on until you are a millionaire!"